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AUTHOR Brown, Michael H.
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ABSTRACT

The Wilderness Vision Quest is an outdoor retreat which helps participants touch, explore, and develop important latent human resources such as imagination, intuition, creativity, inspiration, and insight. Through the careful and focused use of techniques such as deep relaxation, reflective writing, visualization, guided imagery, symbolic drawing, expressive movement and group process, participants learn how to bond deeply to themselves, each other, and to the natural world, and return to their normal lives empowered and renewed. This article reflects on: (1) the meaning of wilderness in the United States; (2) the dynamics of the process of transformation; (3) effective ways to provoke transformative experiences; (4) transpersonal psychology; (5) the function of the brain; (6) ways to harmonize body and spirit on trips into nature; and (7) a process called Creative Explorations of Inner Space. (Author/CW)

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WILDERNESS VISION QUEST: A JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION

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BY

MICHAEL H. BROWN, M.A.
HUMAN RESOURCES CONSULTANT
6214 HIBBLING AVENUE
SPRINGFIELD, VIRGINIA, 22150
(703)569-3538

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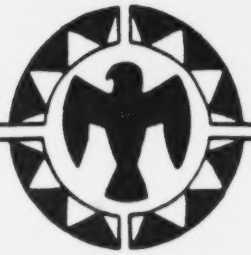
MICHAEL H. BROWN, M.A.
HUMAN RESOURCES CONSULTANT



PSYCHOSYNTHESIS
TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

WILDERNESS VISION QUEST: A JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION

FORTUNATUS ET ILLE DEOS QUI NOVIT AGRESTES.
FORTUNATE IS ONE WHO KNOWS THE COUNTRY GODS.
ANON

INTRODUCTION

John Muir tells us to: Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.

Henry David Thoreau once said: I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

Allow me to be a guide for you in this article, on an intellectual search for an understanding about how we can experience and enjoy the peace, freshness and energy of which Muir speaks, through intimate encounters with nature. Like Thoreau, let's deliberately front some essential facts about our need for personal growth and spiritual development, and consider how we might fulfill these important goals through meaningful excursions into the natural world.

In this article, we will reflect on:

* The meaning of wilderness in the United States, and how it can be a powerful resource for personal and spiritual growth;
* The dynamics of the process of transformation;
* The rituals, ceremonies and rites-of-passage people have used throughout time to provoke transformative experiences in nature;
* The emerging field of Transpersonal Psychology, and how it can help facilitate the constructive exploration, enrichment, healing, and growth of the human spirit in nature;
* The different functions of the left and right sides of the brain and how we must experience their integration to gain the most from our outdoor experiences;
* Ways to harmonize body, feelings, mind, senses, and spirit on trips into nature;

6214 HIBBLING AVENUE, SPRINGFIELD, VA 22150 (703) 569-3538

* A specific process called CREATIVE EXPLORATIONS OF INNER SPACE (CEIS) which taps, and make useful, the powerful inspiration which can result from an intimate encounter with the natural world.

BACKGROUND

As a Human Resources Consultant, trained in a discipline called Psychosynthesis, and specializing in the field of Transpersonal Psychology, for sixteen years I have been conducting personal growth and professional training programs for individuals, groups, corporations and governmental agencies throughout the United States and Canada. My commitment is to help people affirm their strengths, identify and transform their obstacles to success, develop their unique personal resources, increase their motivation for living, improve their productivity, and enhance the effectiveness of the organizations for which they work.

In 1976, in an effort to provide high quality training programs for individuals and groups, I began to commit 20% of my time to conducting retreats in nature. Since then I have led more than 600 people on innovative outdoor programs which, at various times, have involved hiking, camping, backpacking, canoeing, raft, and horseback trips.

When a program is oriented toward personal or spiritual growth, it is called a Wilderness Vision Quest. When it is oriented more toward professional development, it is called a Career Development Quest. Whatever the activity or period of time--an afternoon walk along a nature trail, a weekend retreat at a conference center, five days hiking along the Appalachian Trail, or a two week exploration of classified wilderness--I seek to help people renew themselves, improve their relationships with one another, and bond deeply to the natural world.

STRESS AND TENSION

> When you ask why I dwell here docile among the far green hills, I laugh in my heart. My heart is happy. The peach-blossom watches the river running but remains content. There is a better heaven and earth than the busy world of men. Li Po

There are so many demands on us in everyday life that our energies are almost always focused in activity of one sort or another. We must care about our families and friends, develop and sustain careers, deal with the stress and tension of the modern world. We are accustomed to feeling closed, resisting noise, erecting walls between ourselves and others. And all too often, fear is the motivating force behind our actions in the world.

In the hurry and pressure of modern living, many of us experience conflict, insecurity, and discontentment within. We have the intuition of wholeness, but find ourselves divided into many parts. We need to connect to a source of wisdom to direct our lives with purpose and meaning, but where can we turn for such guidance? Our greatest task in life is to develop and actualize the deep springs of inner wisdom that flow within us. We must explore the depths of our own human nature, and the ideal site for this is in the natural world.

> There are levels of reality within us that are much greater than our analytical minds can know. Nonetheless, we can make them accessible to our awareness so that they become channels by which we reconnect ourselves to the great source of life. Evoking the depths of ourselves is a way to the renewal of our humanity. It is a way, and a method, by which we can become more truly and fully persons and by which we can carry ourselves beyond the subjectivity of being merely individuals in a self-seeking world.[1]

WILDERNESS

In the United States we have come to value wilderness. Through the Wilderness Act of 1964, and the Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975, Congress has officially set aside more than 80 million acres of land as classified wilderness. Building slowly over the course of this century however, this national appreciation of wilderness has been a relatively new phenomenon. In the early days of this country, the wilderness was too much with us, as it were. Settlers and pioneers had to continually deal with life and death situations and endure harsh realities on the plains, in the mountains and forests, and on our waterways, in the basic struggle to survive.

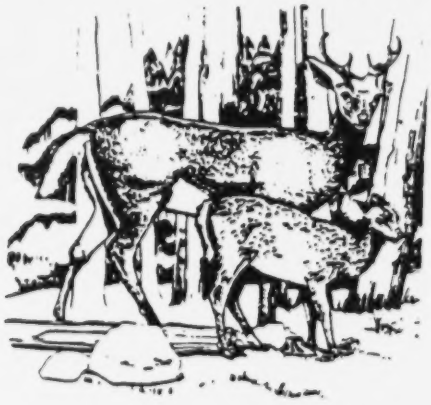
But times have changed. The continent is settled. In less than 500 years, from the time the early European explorers began to move across a land that was essentially 1.9 billion acres of wilderness, less than 2% truly remains untrammeled today. The scarcity of wilderness increased its value to the point where Congress had to step in and officially ensure that some small portion remained for future generations to experience and enjoy.

> It is our task, in our time and in our generation, to hand down undiminished to those who come after us, as was handed down to us by those who went before, the natural wealth and beauty which is ours. John Kennedy.

Today, there are a large number of organizations in the United States that guide people on experiences of wild country--each with its own purpose and objective. More than 400 colleges and universities offer courses related to outdoor experiential education. Outward Bound and the National Outdoor Leadership School emphasize physical challenge and high adventure as a way to conquer fear, let go of

negative self-concepts, break through psychological barriers, and enhance self-esteem.

The American Rivers Conservation Council offers canoe and raft trips down splendid and pristine waterways, as part of its educational and conservation effort. The American Forestry Association offers horseback trips and trail rides in the wilderness of our western states. The Smithsonian Institution offers group excursions to coastal and wilderness areas of Alaska, among other places. The National Audubon Society and the National Wildlife Federation offer programs on bird watching, plant identification and the study, observation and protection of endangered species.



SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

But why is wilderness so important to us? Why does it so capture our imagination? The term 'wilderness' evokes different images for different people, but I believe the urge to officially designate areas as WILDERNESS, and to protect these areas from mining, grazing, timbering and other multiple use, is an outer expression of a universal inner need: the need to hold and honor, within us and in the world, some small part of life as sacred. Thoreau once said, "In wildness is the preservation of the world."

Wilderness provides us with the opportunity to witness ecosystems as they evolve outside man's influence, to enjoy animals in their natural habitat, to witness a primal state of cooperation, balance, harmony and wholeness. Each part of nature contributes indispensably to the whole--from the smallest micro-organism to the giant redwood trees--in the oneness that truly is life. The struggles of life, death, regeneration and renewal can be found in every corner of the natural world: caterpillars changing into winged butterflies; verdant life bursting forth from the floor of charred and burned out forests; the ruffled grouse charging us with outspread wings to protect her young; trees struck by lightning, upturned by wind and wave and water, smashed by other fallen trees, still reaching upward toward the light, still growing, still alive!

It is time for us to speak openly, and with a clear voice, about the spiritual value of our contact with the natural world. It is time

to acknowledge the fact that perhaps the highest use of wilderness is as a site for the constructive exploration, enrichment, healing, and growth of the human spirit.

Sigurd Olson, a prolific writer [2], [3] and one of the founders of The Wilderness Society, said that

> Wilderness to the people of America is a spiritual necessity, an antidote to the high pressure of modern life, a means of regaining serenity and equilibrium.

Arthur Carhart, a Forest Service employee in the 1920's, involved in laying the foundation for the National Wilderness Preservation System, said

> Perhaps the rebuilding of the body and spirit is the greatest service derivable from our forests, for of what worth are material things if we lose the character and the quality of the people who are the soul of America? [4]

There is an almost exponential growth in the number of people who are turning explicitly to environment for a deeper sense of naturalness, simplicity and solitude, and a tangible spirituality grounded in the mysteries of nature. Records show that, in 1986, there were more than 275 million visitor days to the National Parks alone. Why are so many of us going outdoors these days? For what do we search?

> One yearns...
> The rivers of existence,
> the very founts of life
> to reach. Goethe

This need for meaningful outdoor experience is a healthy and holy movement: a response to an inner urge for excellence and well-being that can become so eclipsed in urban living. In fact, we must experience and deeply explore the natural world in our quest for wholeness. We live in bodies that are exquisitely wired by three billion years of evolution to perceive and respond to subtle shifts in color, temperature, sound and movement. We are natural creatures living, to a large degree, in unnatural surroundings, disconnected from the weaving, pulsing, throbbing web of life. We have to do something fairly radical to kick-start ourselves back into full operation once again, but we must do it in a way that honors the integrity of our body, feelings, mind and spirit.

Few of us know how to gently approach the mysteries and wonder of nature, to find real simplicity in the wilds, to set the stage for an experience of the eternal, the infinite, the ineffable. With few exceptions, organizations that lead people into wild country simply hope that such special experiences will occur, for these are the moments we remember and cherish most. We know we are moved by our experiences in nature, but few of us can really articulate how or why. We need to develop a new approach to, understanding of, and language

about, our outdoor experiences if we are to secure, preserve, and most meaningfully enjoy the last truly wild regions on the planet.

TRANSFORMATION

It is interesting to note that, although our experiences in nature are often exciting, educational, meaningful, and touch us in many ways, they are not always transformative. There is a tremendous difference between recreation or adventure, on the one hand, and the life changing experience of transformation, on the other. It is about the process of transformation that we will focus in this article.

The concept of transformation is powerful and complex. It represents a complete change of being, and a shift to a higher mode of operating. It implies the awakening of new levels of awareness; a fundamental resolution of the internal causes of stress; the discovery and clarification of essential values; the creation of new goals through which to manifest these values in the world; and the redirection of life energies toward a higher and more fulfilling purpose.

It is obvious that something very powerful must take place for real transformation to occur. Unfortunately, this does not always happen as a result of our forays into nature. Our experiences may change us for awhile, but our roles, masks, and personality patterns too readily assert themselves again, re-form and reknit! And, unhappily, much of the positive energy to which we connect in nature simply decays over time, and too often only vague memories remain of the fun, difficult, or exciting times we have had outdoors.

How do we reach for, experience, or facilitate transformation on our wilderness and backcountry trips? How can we create a state of readiness which allows us to hear the voice of nature, be touched by wonder, develop our intuition, and let the energies of inspiration move powerfully through us? How can we move closer to a primal sense of the unity which underlies all creation and, for our efforts, be regenerated and renewed at the deepest levels?

RITUALS, CEREMONIES, AND RITES OF PASSAGE

There are many models which can teach us about the potential for transformation in nature. People throughout the world have employed a vast array of methods with which to set aside their worries and concerns, develop the latent resources of the inner Self, and experience transformation, in nature. Rituals, ceremonies, and rites of passage have existed throughout time to help people experience the regenerative effects of the transformative process. Procedures were developed to break what might be called the cultural trance, so that one could see life fully and in great detail, and from many points of view, including

> ...a wide range of methods, from the use of psychoactive substances of plant and animal origin, trance dancing, fasting, sleep deprivation, shock, and physical torture, to elaborate spiritual practices such as those developed within the Hindu and Buddhist traditions.[5]

For centuries, in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, people have gone to caves, mountain tops and other remote places to practice yoga, meditation, and other spiritual disciplines directed toward the realization of the Self. [6] The history of Christianity is full of stories about hermits, mystics and monks--people like St. Francis and St. Claire of Assisi--who, through prayer, fasting, and severe disciplines in nature, have labored to develop their spiritual potential. [7] Aborigines in Australia developed the ritual of the year long Walkabout as a rite of passage from dependent childhood and adolescence to an adult yet mystical relationship with the world around them. [8] Shamen in Siberia, through drumming, chanting, and other exotic practices, experience intense trance states, and what is described as spirit flight, to learn the secrets of the healing arts. [9] The Huichol Indians in Mexico use the hallucinogenic peyote cactus in spiritual ceremonies, then share the lessons they learn about themselves and creation in beautiful yarn paintings. [10]

On the continent of North America, native people developed elaborate rituals for vision questing. The Sioux, Crow, Cheyenne, Pawnee, and many other tribes and nations deeply believed in the necessity of seeking visions to guide one's life. They saw man as the bridge between earth and sky or, expressed in a sacred way, as the bridge between spirit and matter. When life lost its meaning, when misfortune came, or change was imminent, it was time to leave the community, go on a vision quest, and seek contact with the wisdom of the spirit world.

> Plains elders cultivated an atmosphere which prompted their children to seek a revelation at an early age, either directly or indirectly. A boy grew up hearing constantly that all success in life had its beginnings in visions; hence he would go away to fast, praying for a powerful benefit. A mature man or woman would also seek a vision whenever a special need arose.[11]

> Without a vision, a man was next to nothing, since he had no source of power, no special wisdom, and no protection... Any Indian who failed to achieve a clear and successful vision would constantly express his wretchedness over his situation. He remained like one in a desert without water, and unable to find peace or rest.[12]

> The essential thing to bear in mind is that in their quest to reach an accord with all things, the Indians assumed that invisible presences existed to answer every need, and that all they required was a means of making them visible so as to deal with them on a man-to-man basis. The ultimate process which evolved brought them into close contact with the supernatural and the natural worlds and enabled them to live in harmony with these in all their extremes.[13]

These rituals, ceremonies, and rites-of-passage were rigorous and demanding on every level; were approached with reverence; were conducted or supervised by wise elders of the community with long experience in using the methods and techniques; were carried out in a sacred way; and were always carefully integrated.

> We must all see ourselves as part of this earth, not as an enemy from the outside who tries to impose his will on it. We who know the meaning of the pipe, also know that, being a living part of the earth, we cannot harm any part of her without hurting ourselves. Lame Deer

Clearly, we have no such understanding or traditions in western society. The exploration of consciousness is not widely validated in our culture as it is, and has been, elsewhere. Neither do we make, as a primary goal in life, the development of our deep human resources, to our great detriment!

We have few rituals of transition, from one stage in life to another, that inspire, empower, or help us continually unfold our human potential. We scoff at native and primitive practices while, at the same time, many of us live boring, superficial, or tragic lives which lack depth or meaning. Some of us remain too long in jobs that no longer challenge us, or too quickly leave relationships, not understanding that it is the growth in consciousness that helps us remain vital and alive. One result is the fact that nearly 80% of the disease in North America is stress related: a result that surely results from a lack of vision. How can we remedy this frightful situation?

TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Important insights into the process of transformation are being discovered these days in an exciting new field called Transpersonal Psychology. [14], [15], [16] Transpersonal Psychology represents the cutting

edge in psychological research today, exploring hidden dimensions of the human psyche and blazing new trails on the frontiers of human resource development.

In Latin, trans means "on the other side of", as implied in the words trans-atlantic or trans-continental; or "above and beyond" as implied in the word transcend. In Latin, persona means "mask". At the broadest level, then, Transpersonal Psychology seeks to help us:

1) Understand how to "get above or beyond" our personalities so we can see them clearly, understand their origins and dynamics, integrate their functions, and transform them when possible;
2) Look "on the other side of" these roles, patterns and masks to discover what is hidden, blocked, defended, or unknown within us;
3) Develop new levels of awareness and latent human resources;
4) Consciously play roles in life that manifest our deepest values so that we can bring into the world our best talents and abilities, and live increasingly meaningful, productive, wise and loving lives.

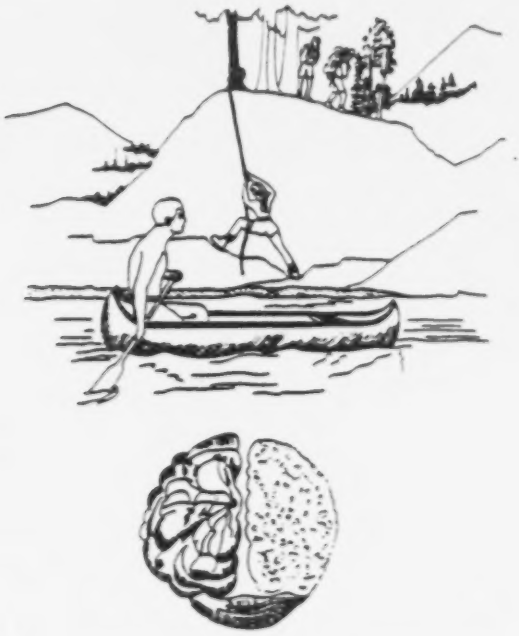
To accomplish these goals, Transpersonal Psychology investigates and explores the deepest realms of the human unconscious. It seeks to understand how extraordinary events impact and affect the human psyche--events such as rituals, ceremonies, and rites of passage, the near-death experience, altered states of consciousness, the use of psychedelic substances, profound grief, meditation and yoga, psychic phenomena, trance and mystical states, and other unusual experiences different from what are considered to be normal states of awareness. Transpersonal Psychology also carefully employs specific methods and techniques to help people develop important human resources such as imagination, intuition, creativity, inspiration, and insight. Some of these methods and techniques are discussed later in the article.

In its research, Transpersonal Psychology has discovered three important steps that must be honored in the transformative process: preparation, exploration, and integration. Transformation requires us to be willing to take off our masks, and ready to explore our inner depths. It requires us to be willing to experience ourselves in new ways (to face our fears, for instance; to release our emotions; to be touched by wonder; to have the primal forces of nature move powerfully through us). And transformation requires us to take responsibility for the new things we learn about ourselves, and integrate our new insights and energy in our everyday lives.

But what does all of this have to do with wilderness? Let's consider how the brain operates, and look at some of the things that usually happen on wilderness and backcountry trips. And let's think about some specific things we can do, if we are ready and willing, to experience a process of transformation in the natural world.

HOW THE BRAIN OPERATES

First, some fundamental questions. What is 'consciousness'? Webster defines consciousness as the awareness of one's thoughts, feelings and impressions. But who, or what is conscious? It is the 'Self' within us that is conscious [17], [18], [19], and the brain is the organ of awareness. The brain is divided into two hemispheres, left and right, and recent neuro-physiological research suggests that each side of the brain has different functions. [20], [21], [22]



LEFT SIDE OF THE BRAIN

OUTER DIRECTED
PURPOSEFUL

RATIONAL
LOGICAL
ANALYTICAL

WILL
STRENGTH
ENDURANCE

The left side of the brain helps us handle outer directed activities, and controls the rational, logical, and analytical functions of the Self. The left brain helps us perceive, understand, and respond to realities in the world around us, and helps us fulfill our objectives and goals. When stimulated, the left brain provides us with the energy required to acheive specific goals--energies such as will, strength, and endurance.

Most wilderness and backcountry programs 'single mindedly' stimulate the functions of the left side of the brain. "Hard skills and technical abilities need to survive in the wilderness, for rock climbing, canoeing, backpacking, foraging for and preparing food, require a high degree of left brain activity.

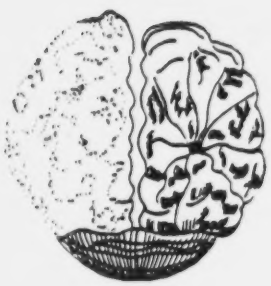
The right side of the brain helps us handle inner directed activities, and connects us to the meaning dimension of life. It controls the receptive, intuitive, and symbolic functions of the Self. The right brain helps us perceive, understand and respond to the powerful dynamics within us. When stimulated, the right brain provides us with energies which enhance our quality of being such as compassion, empathy, and love.

RIGHT SIDE OF THE BRAIN

INNER DIRECTED
MEANINGFUL

RECEPTIVE
INTUITIVE
SYMBOLIC

COMPASSION
EMPATHY
LOVE



"Soft skills" such as relaxation, reflective writing, poetry, dream work, visualization, art, music, dance and mime turn on the functions of the right side of the brain. These methods can help us understand, find the meaning of, and integrate the effects of our adventures in the natural world.

Balanced communication between the left and right sides of the brain result in a state called whole brain thinking. To be powerfully transformative, backcountry treks must provide us with the opportunity to experience this whole brain thinking. Far removed from the demands of civilization, wilderness is the perfect context in which: to integrate the functions of the left and right sides of the brain; through this, to discover the meaning and purpose of our lives; to harmonize goal oriented behavior with essential values; and to experience our full humanity.

> Communication between the program of the 'Self' and its gradually learned projection, the worldly 'I', seem possible only during the hallucinatory or dream state where the 'I' and the 'Self' meet...We interpret the communications during these states as a striving for consistency between the 'I' and the 'Self'...'Who is speaking, and to whom?' The 'Self' and 'I' are speaking--and to each other. The creative act is a luxurious byproduct of this dialogue and is the very source of art, science, literature and religion. [23]

But let's be honest: it is very difficult, and often frightening, to step out of the normal flow of our lives and go exploring in the terra incognita of the unconscious, just as it can be frightening to go exploring in the wilderness. The parallels are not insignificant! But it is important that we do so if we wish to develop our full potential as biological, psychological, and spiritual beings.

Organizations that lead people on wild country excursions offer their participants many important experiences. They care about safety, focus on the development of technical skills or leadership potential, teach people the ethics of wilderness travel, deliver high adventure, and do a superb job achieving their goals. They know that powerful transformative experiences can occur in nature, and they know that this is what many of their participants need and implicitly seek.

But few organizations are willing or able to provide the delicate guidance required to help participants fully take advantage of wilderness or backcountry trips. Few organizations help participants experience themselves in depth, so many people do not gain the very most from their outdoor adventures. We can all do more to balance adventure related activities with inner directed processes on wilderness or backcountry trips, whether we are alone; with our families, friends, or colleagues; or work for organizations commissioned to guide people on outdoor programs.

WILDERNESS VISION QUEST

> If nature is a harmony and man a part of nature, then man himself must be innately harmonic. The laws governing his mind and body reflect and partake of the functioning of greater nature.[24]

The Wilderness Vision Quest, developed over 11 years, is a program intended to help participants experience their full humanity. It is a whole experience, touching body, feelings, mind, senses, and spirit. Very few occasions in ordinary life touch us on these many levels all at the same time. The program is designed to carefully guide participants back to a natural state of balance and well-being.

There are many parts of us coming to the land: parts that are afraid of the unknown; parts that need to let go and relax; parts that need to be discovered; parts that have not been heard from in years. There are parts of us that need to be enlivened, refreshed, renewed; parts that can become more capable and independent, adaptive and creative, open and responsive. We need to slow down to tune into these many parts of us, listen to their needs, and begin to bring them all together in a wholistic way.

On a Wilderness Vision Quest we hope, not to conquer nature, but to know her. We hope to leave behind our neurotic competitiveness, attachment to material comforts, and unsatisfying patters of interacting with others. We hope to listen more closely to our authentic needs, and learn how to meet them. The first and most important step, then, is to slow down. We have to take the time to move beneath our fear and tension to discover what is essential in us and in the world around us.

BODY

The mornings begin with slow and deliberate stretching movements, Hatha Yoga, [25] and other kinds of body work that gently flex and extend all of the major muscle systems. Many of us live with chronic stress and tension. These morning exercises teach us how to breathe into and release our tension, acknowledge our physical limitations while gradually becoming more loose and flexible. Stretching exercises, first thing in the morning, can free us from the nagging worries and concerns to which we often awaken, and can help us greet the day with peacefulness and response-ability.

This kind of slow gentle attunment to our own bodies can set a mood and a way of being which follows us throughout the day, and can greatly determine how we confront ourselves, each other, and our experiences in nature. Other relaxation methods are introduced as well, techniques of meditation, breath control, guided imagery--methods that teach us how to be fully in the present moment, in the 'here-and-now' so that we can listen to, sense, and absorb the energies that surround us.

On a Wilderness Vision Quest, there is no specific distance we travel each day. The speed or distance we traverse depends completely on the situation at hand. We generally move around for 3-5 hours a day, but we stop often to rest and enjoy the space in which we find ourselves.

Each quest is composed of many different people: old and young, men and women, some experienced and strong in outdoor adventure. But the vast majority of participants, perhaps 85% or so, have never done anything like this before, are new to outdoor activities, and are in normal physical condition. Because of this, each person is taught how to listen to his or her own body, and find his or her own pace and style of being in nature.

We move, not to push ourselves further than we have ever gone before, or to find new levels of endurance, but purely for the

pleasure of movement: to feel the mountains with our muscles, to watch the beauty of the land go by, to celebrate the joy of physical activity. It is rigorous but not exhausting, and great fun.

FEELINGS

Many of us are accustomed to holding our feelings deep inside. We are afraid to let them out, afraid to show what we judge to be our imperfections, afraid to be vulnerable with others, afraid to seem incompetent. We play certain specific roles in life that hold us within narrow limits of risk taking.

> The normal adjustment of the average, common sense, well-educated man implies a continued successful rejection of much of the depths of human nature... To adjust well to the world of reality... means that the person turns his back on much in himself because it is dangerous. But is now clear that by so doing, he loses a great deal too, for these depths are also the source of all his joys, his ability to play, to love, to laugh and... to be creative. By protecting himself against the hell within himself, he also cuts himself off from the heaven within.[26]

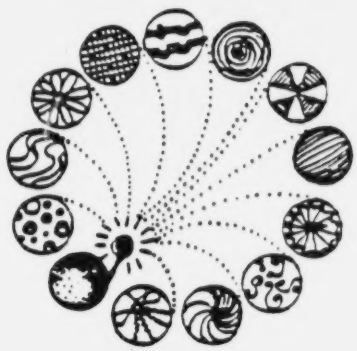
It is not easy to change these tendencies. To a large degree, these patterns are vital to our very survival in the busy technological world today, or so it seems. Creating a safe or sacred context for the revelation of what is deeply held within us--feelings and emotions, pain, insights, inspiration--is a delicate undertaking.

We often take the time to share who we are, what we are discovering, and the depth of our experience, through the use of a ritual tool called a Power Object. This can be a stick or stone or hand-crafted object that the group has chosen, by consensus, to be a focusing agent. Each person has a turn to hold the Power Object as it rotates clockwise around a sharing circle.

The ritual use of a Power Object is one Native American process that deserves wider recognition. With it, each person has the undivided attention of the whole group for a significant period of time. We can share our thoughts, sing a song (known, or created on the spot), dance, confront someone, remain silent and/or simply pass it on, or do anything else we need to do for as long as we care to share our unique energies with the group. No one is allowed to interrupt the holder of the Power Object without first getting the permission of the holder to speak. When the holder is finished, he or she passes it on to the next participant.

This process creates a tremendous focus of group attention. A strong, dynamic field of caring and support becomes available to everyone, in the light of which many important lessons are learned. Through the use of a Power Object, we learn how to listen with respect

to other group members, and learn how to share with authenticity what is really in our own minds and hearts.



DIET

On a classical Native American Vision Quest, the initiate took no food, water or other equipment which might distance him or her from a primal contact with nature, and he or she remained in an exposed state, often in a dangerous location, for three or four days. The ritual was intended to provoke what we might call a psychological crisis, and help externalize and/or release powerful, often repressed, inner forces. To native and primitive people, this was necessary to access deep spiritual levels of awareness, develop new powers, to find a protecting totem, spirit guide, or vision of transformation.

Few of us are willing to go to these extremes to grow personally, professionally, or spiritually, but with the use of methods from Transpersonal Psychology, the severity of such ancient processes is not essential. A light diet can be very important, however.

One of the ways we stay unconscious in our lives is simply by eating too much. We eat when we are nervous. We eat to celebrate our success. We eat to avoid experiencing our sadness, anger, sexuality, loneliness, grief, fear. But this eating weighs us down, deadens our senses, and makes us sluggish. We need to be able to experience the full spectrum of human emotions to be maximumly and creatively alive. We miss much of the potential for dynamic living, and many opportunities to grow, through an abuse of food.

On a Wilderness Vision Quest, we take about a pound of food to eat per day. This consists of foods that do not require cooking, such as nuts, dried fruit, hard cheese, bread, milk or juice powder, meats such as tuna, pepperoni, salami, etc. On most outdoor programs, a vast amount of time is spent in food preparation and cleanup, but on a Wilderness Vision Quest, we eat out of our 'forage bag' whenever we feel hungry, and utilize the many hours saved in other more meaningful ways.

This light diet is an essential part of a Wilderness Vision Quest and, although many people express concern about this aspect of the program initially, everyone is grateful for this component of the trip when the program is complete. In fact, many participants have food

left over at the end of a trip! We take this journey to learn how to be nourished in different ways: through contact with our own inner depths; through close rapport with others; through a greater rapport with the natural world.

MIND AND SENSES

It is clear that anxiety and tension result from negative mental processes, and dysfunctional ways of thinking. We brood about past events, review old battles, worry about future disasters, rehearse upcoming situations, become overwhelmed by the many choices in our lives, and seldom surrender to the incredible richness and magic of the present moment. Educated in contemporary left-brain dominant schools, we are far more use to thinking and intellectualizing than to flowing with experiential learning, and we are stuck far too often in our heads!

Still, we need to think about and understand our experiences in nature so that we can learn from them. For this reason, a workbook or journal of blank paper is an essential item in our packs, along with colored felt-tip pens and other drawing materials, and we take time each day to write about our special experiences, draw the scenes which move us, an record what we are learning.

> The workbook is the hinge of the process because in it the individual records and re-experiences the inner continuity of his life. As he involves himself in the workbook, the process of inward growth establishes itself in his consciousness. It validates itself and becomes tangible for him. Increasingly, as he continues in the process, he feels the presence of the principle of wholeness working within him.[27]

Camping, living on the land, responding to the changing weather patterns pulls us out of our heads and into our senses. We feel the cold and must respond by putting on a coat or sweater. We become aware of the dance of light and shadows as the sun breaks through the clouds, penetrates through the foliage and illuminates the world below. We smell fragrant perfumes that waft up from the forest floor. We stop to listen to the geese approach, and marvel at the order in their flight. We all need to struggle against the inertia of our unfortunate self-neglect, and need to strive for a state of primal, clear perception like mushrooms push against the soil reaching for the light.

SPIRIT

Our spirit or enthusiasm for living increases in direct relation to our capacity to see broadly the meaning and purpose of our lives. As we begin to let go and relax, and experience some of the functions of the right side of the brain, we move from rational or linear to

more expanded levels of awareness, which help strengthen our spiritual energies.

Visualization, imagination and the symbolic function are right brain activities which help us see wholistically, with the mind's eye, that which the rational mind can only percieve one discreet element at a time. Imagination can take into account many aspects of our experience--both inner and outer--all at once, and can present us with a mental picture or unitive symbol which can reveal the truth of our situation in its complexity, wholeness, and significance.

> There is also the special quality of the symbolic process that causes the self-balancing wisdom of life. The inherent capacity of the universe to heal and reintegrate itself in its individual parts is made accessible to man through the symbolic dimension.[28]

FASCINATIONS

As we learn to tune into deeper levels of awareness with openness and receptivity, we are far more able to feel and appreciate nature. It is as if there is more space within us in which to receive her. One way of expanding our rapport with nature comes through an exercise developed by the author called FASCINATIONS.

In our journals, we list all the aspects of the natural environment which have caught our attention, stimulated or moved us in special ways. Then we explore these fascinations one by one, using the imaginative tools we have learned, in a process developed by the author called CREATIVE EXPLORATIONS OF INNER SPACE (CEIS). The specific steps of the CEIS process can be found in greater detail at the end of this article. Its use on wilderness and backcountry trips, and also in the process of Organizational Transformation, are documented elsewhere.[29, 30]

We write about a fascination in detail, focusing our left brain thinking on its color, shape, size, and inter-relatedness to the rest of the environment. Then we close our eyes and, with right brain awareness, visualize this fascination as best we can. Then we draw a picture of it with colored felt-tip pens or oil pastels, taking the time to represent it in our own unique artistic and symbolic way. Finally, we ask the inner image a most important question: "What do you have to teach me at this moment in my life?"

Asking an inner image or symbol for a teaching, in the silence of our deep inner world, activates the function of intuition and, surprisingly, in our conscious minds we hear an answer to the question. We write the answer in our journals. Finally, we identify with our fascination in a physical and role-playing way; become the fascination with gesture and spontaneous movement. This is a creative, fun, mysterious and wonderful way to interact with nature.

It is a way to leave our tight and guarded personality space behind and embody many interesting aspects of our fascination.

We are drawn to, or fascinated by, certain aspects of nature because something in us resonates with them. There are deeper qualities, potentials, truths and talents within each one of us waiting to be acknowledged, explored and actualized. These undiscovered parts of our inner selves contain a certain psychological voltage which is magnetic, and we are drawn to facets of nature which, when fully explored and embodied (in a process like CEIS) can reveal to the conscious mind that which lies beneath it. When we enter the symbolic dimension this deeply, many new levels of insight, energy, and wisdom become available to us. We are profoundly able to feel and to experience an essential contact with nature, and discover how nature can directly touch and guide our lives.

RHODODENDRON FLOWERS

The fascinations process is a powerful process---the fruit of many years of training and experience with the tools of Transpersonal Psychology and Psychosynthesis. Because it may be difficult to understand by simply reading a description of the process, it may be more illuminating to read about an actual fascination recorded in nature.

The following is a fascination taken from the author's own journal on a week-long Wilderness Vision Quest at Crabtree Falls, along the Appalachian Trail in southern Virginia, May 24-30, 1982.

> I was struck by the beauty of large purple blossoms on the Rhododendron trees which covered the mountainside along Crabtree Falls. I found a cluster of them lying beside the trail, picked them up and held them against my walking stick as I climbed the trail. I was hiking mindlessly, empty of everything except the will to get to the top, and the command to my body to hike. But the flowers I held were compelling, and I found myself studying them, wondering, touched.
>
> I kept getting something from the flowers about being alive---that I am alive---open up and feel it! Accept it. As I looked into the middle of the flowers, I was in great awe of the wisdom that made these flowers grow on the tip of the tree branch. I was impressed by their delicate stamen

and pistil: how did they know to stick out so far? Pollen: inter-tree communication, carried by the insects and the wind. What precious and important information traveled down these fragile parts to the branch, limb, trunk, to the roots, to the spirit of the tree which guides its growth.

I got deeply into the flowers while I hiked and when I rested. Then I realized that I wasn't allowing myself to be with, or experience, this group of people with the same caring attention. I would look at someone and glance away; observe their personality traits and react, respond or be indifferent. I realized that I didn't really know these people, and began to watch them more closely; feel them more deeply. I began to allow myself to know them. I had moved from a state of separateness and detachment, through the light trance of hiking, to contemplating the flowers of this tree, to a state of active awareness and receptivity to the people in my group.

After I had drawn a picture of these flowers in my journal, I visualized them with my mind's eye. I asked the inner image of the flowers what it had to teach me, and this is what occurred to me in my conscious mind:

> "You are fragile and vulnerable now. You have been through a deepening process which leaves you open and receptive, sensitive to life. You, too, are a mystery of nature. You, yourself! Go into the heart of your own mystery and touch the Life in you. You are a unique creation which, like we flowers, will bloom but for a time and then perish. But celebrate your existence now. You are alive!
>
> "You have much work ahead of you. It is the flowering of your past growth and professional efforts. Acknowledge this and let this awareness into you. Rejoice. Be open. Reveal your own true colors, and your own special fragrance to the world. Let others take your gifts, your own special pollen, and carry it away. You, too, are fragile. You were meant to be. It is part of your nature. Celebrate this, too. You are an expression of the earth. It surrounds your spirit and gives it form. You are an expression of her flowering!"

I am a flowering of the Tree of Live. I am a peak experience in my very existence: for the planet, for the mother earth, for the race of man. I will be fully what I am, until I am no longer!

When I stood up and became the flowers in imagination, with spontaneous movement, there was almost an explosion of awareness--almost an orgasmic sensation. As the flowers, I could feel my interdependence with the insects, with the wind, with other trees. I felt joy and excitement to be fully open. Time took on a much different meaning, and the sun felt ecstatically warm and supportive.

When I sat to record and document this experience, I felt much closer to the people in my group than at any other time. The feelings of closeness lasted for the duration of the weeklong quest.

As we learn how to observe, interact, and participate this fully with nature, we leave behind those patterns and beliefs that keep us feeling so separate and alone. We discover the unity of life and the importance of our special part in it. Empowered by this perspective and these kind of experiences, we can return to our daily lives changed in a positive way: open, responsive and alive, and more able to align our actions in the world with our deepest values.

ALONE DAY

A Wilderness Vision Quest of five days or longer culminates with an alone day: 24 hours of solitude on the land, away from the other group members. The purpose of this days is to confront, on a one-to-one basis, the depth and mystery of creation. It is always an intimate and intense encounter.

We have learned how to slow down, to open up, and listen. We have gradually made ourselves available on many different levels, and have many new channels of awareness with which to perceive the world. Because we have learned to become empty of our personal concerns, we can be filled by nature. Because we have seen, and participated in, the drama of transformation all around us, we begin to accept the possibility that we, too, can change and evolve in meaningful ways. And because there is inner silence, we can begin to hear what nature, moving through her many cycles, has to teach us.

As we travel in wilderness, backcountry or natural areas, eating lightly, moving slowly, our innate healing energies begin to work in us. We cry more easily when we've gotten to the ridges and panoramic views. We let go and release our tensions. We can see the broader view of our lives back in the regular world and can forgive much, in ourselves and in others. We find compassion in the realization that we are all separate and unique, struggling to do the best we can, and that, on every level of existence, LIFE seeks union, harmony and wholeness. With clarified visions, renewed energy, and strong intention we can return transformed from our experience of the natural world!

CREATIVE EXPLORATIONS OF INNER SPACE (CEIS)

This outlines, very specifically, the steps in the FASCINATIONS process mentioned above. These steps can be followed as described below, and done at an appropriate time during any outdoor experience. The process takes about an hour to complete.

Step 1: **Preparation.** If we desire to have contact with deeper aspects of our inner Selves, with others, or with the natural world, we must make sure that we will be undistracted during our encounter. Therefore it is important to make a good preparation. We can walk away from our group, seek silence and solitude, and blend in with the natural world around us.

Step 2: **Deep Relaxation.** Take about five minutes for deep relaxation. Simply close your eyes, breathe deeply a few times, and let go of your stress and tension. This can help you detach from the external world and tune into your body, feelings, mind and senses.

Step 3: **Reflective Thinking.** Make a list of the various aspects of nature which have been fascinating to you. Then choose the one fascination which means the most to you. Write about this fascination in great detail: what it is; in what niche it makes its living or finds expression; size, shape, color; what it means to you; and how you feel about it. Take about 15 minutes to consciously reflect on these dimensions and document them in writing.

Step 4: **Receptive Thinking.** Now sit with eyes closed, quietly in a receptive mode, allowing deeper thoughts and feelings to surface and enter your conscious mind. The more subtle aspects of your fascination will rise into your field of awareness and, when they do, record them in your journals. Take about 10 minutes for this.

Step 5: **Visualization.** Close your eyes again and breathe deeply a few times. Then allow an image or mental picture to form in your mind's eye--create an image of your fascination. The images that come to mind are often quite startling.. Seldom are they an exact representation of the outer form. Since the imagination is the holographic function of the psyche, it takes a great many variables into account all at once. The image which appears may be a composite picture of what you have seen on the land, what you know and feel about it, and what it means to you. Give yourself whatever time it takes for this image or mental picture to appear in visualization.

Step 6: **Symbolic Drawing.** Now open your eyes, open your journal and draw a large circle on a blank page. This circle becomes a frame in or around which you can make a drawing of your inner image. Use oil pastels, colored pencils or felt-tip pens, magic markers or other material with which to make the drawing, and take as much time as you need to draw the picture. Some people finish in ten minutes. Others take a half hour. It is not uncommon, once you get the hang of it,

to literally spend hours making a symbolic drawing. Do not be in any way concerned with the artistic value of the drawing. Intellectual judgments or perfectionistic criticisms will prevent the symbolic drawing from occurring in a fluid, fun, and authentic manner.

Step 7: **Cognitive Analysis.** Now analyze your drawing in detail, describing what you see in your journal and how you feel about what you have drawn. What are the differences between the image you saw in your mind's eye and the pictures you were able to draw? What do the colors and shapes mean? Now that the image has been externalized, what further thoughts or reflections come to mind? What is the overall meaning of the drawing? The answers to all these questions are significant, and should be recorded in your journal.

Step 8: **Inner Dialogue.** Now close your eyes once again, take a few deep breaths, and bring back the image into your mind's eye. When you can visualize the image clearly, ask this question silently or out loud, in precisely this way, directly to the image: WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO TEACH ME AT THIS MOMENT IN MY LIFE? Focusing on the inner image, and asking it this question, will help you access very deep levels of consciousness. Nature will speak to you through the voice of your intuition, in a language of poetry and wisdom. As these messages enter your conscious mind, write them down beneath the drawing, in quotation marks. This symbolic dialogue can be repeated once or twice again in the course of about 10 minutes, to extract the maximum intuitive learning.

Step 9: **Identification.** Now stand up with your eyes closed, breathe deeply a few times, and recall the inner image. Visualizing the image clearly once again, let your awareness slip into the living reality of the fascination with which you are working. Become the fascination with your body, letting yourself dance, move, gesture, or assume whatever body posture seems appropriate to this unique expression of the natural world. Let flow through you whatever sounds, noises, or spontaneous music that seems appropriate. The longer you allow yourself to experience this symbolic identification, the deeper you will be moved. Your blocked channels of physical energy will open up, new circuits establish themselves (if but for a little while), and you will experience some of the latent human potentials within you. When you are finished, return to your journal and record your experiences.

Step 10: **Action Plan or Homework.** As you begin to wind down from the CEIS process, reflect on everything that has happened. Wonder what application can be made of the insights, energies and wisdom you have received back in your everyday life. Decide upon several practical ways that you can ground and make use of your insights and inspiration--small, realistic, do-able steps--and commit to doing them upon your return to your normal life. Be sure to document these ideas in detailed writing.

Step 11: **Sharing.** The last step in the CEIS process can help you return to ordinary levels of awareness. Take the time to share

your experience with someone, or in a small group. Talk about your experience in detail, listen to what others have to say, and to their experiences as well. A very powerful bonding will occur through this process, with aspects of your own inner Self, with others, and with the natural world.

Our fascinations on the land can continue to be important teachers long after the experience is complete. Through this kind of process, we gradually learn how to pay special and close attention to what fascinates us on the land, realizing that any part of nature can teach us wonderful things about living, and can become the gateway to profound states of awareness, insight, inspiration, and energy.

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SELECTED PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

How does one describe a Wilderness Vision Quest: unique, cleansing, expanding, totally different from anything one might try to compare it with. Perhaps the way I might try to describe it is, a deep personal experience that reveals self-imposed limitations and helps erase them in a way that opens far greater potential. In retrospect (10 months) the program has led me to discover new abilities and new inner direction. It has helped me gain a feeling of personal fulfillment, and both set and achieve more of my own goals than before. **J. Michael Vasievich, Acting Project Leader, USDA-Forest Service, SE Forest Experiment Station, Durham, N.C.**

We were able to look inward and develop a clarified sense of our own identity, values, life purpose and career goals. Michael is deeply committed to the constructive discovery and enrichment of the human spirit, and quite effectively facilitates this on the WVQ. **John Hendee, Dean, College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho.**

The Wilderness Vision Quest offered by Michael Brown does exactly what it is promoted to do. It awakens you and allows exploration of deep states of awareness by carefully using methods for self-discovery. You learn to open otherwise recessed channels of perception to explore your own inner life, to help put your own life and occupation into a better perspective. A person cannot come away without some new perspective on the way they view their life and many of the elements affecting it. The human spirit is enriched and the senses are heightened. **David E. Porter, Wilderness Specialist, USDI-Bureau of Land Management, Washington, D.C.**

To the non-initiated, I would describe Wilderness Vision Quest activities as exercises in tapping into the little-used "child-like" side of our natures--the intuitive, creative, imaginative side of us which is so often controlled and overridden by our intellect. I personally came back from the program feeling calmer, saner, more in touch with my feelings, renewed in a sense, certainly more self confident because of affirmation of myself from others, and with new priorities. **Pat Munoz, Program Director, American Rivers Conservation Council.**

One of the values of the Wilderness Vision Quest was its emphasis on sensitivity to others' needs. I realize more and more that this sensitivity is a visible quality of most successful people. While the approach and doctrines stressed Self and one's own career, they also stressed sensitivity to others. I have begun to change my behavior to thus project more concern for others in both work and personal settings. It works! I thought all the time I was already doing a good job of being sensitive and responsive to others; I found out that I have much room for growth in this area. **Ken Cordell, Project Leader, USDA-Forest Service, Athens, Ga.**

Michael has a deep appreciation for nature which informs his use of it throughout the Wilderness Vision Quest. He helped us learn that wilderness can add a dimension to our lives from which to draw knowledge and understanding. By sensitizing us to the natural world, we were better able to tune out our everyday lives and tune into ourselves. Nature provided a screening mechanism, a calming force and a mirror of ourselves. The combination of physical and emotional exertion gave me a more complete sense of accomplishment. The hiking let me focus my thoughts on those aspects of my iner life with which I was becoming in touch, or release them to nature as felt comfortable at any moment. The final product was a sense of harmony between body, mind and spirit. **Susan Alexander, Alaska Representative, The Wilderness Society.**

The Career Development Quest is a highly significant and uniquely appropriate use of natural settings. The challenge, solitude, and isolation available in wildlands are necessary to it and it is a professional use of forestland I believe to be a significant addition to existing concepts of restoration and re-creation in a natural environment. I would hope that elements of the CDQ might become part of all wilderness leadership training, and a full fledged personal exploration through a seven day CDQ is a major value to be realized. **Ed Easton, Director, Leadership and Development, The National Wildlife Federation, Washington, D.C.**

Michael's commitment to the use of wilderness as a place for spiritual newness and renewal, and his skill in assisting others in their own quests for renewal, are jewels he offers for us to share. I recommend participation in the quest for anyone interested or involved in natural resource management. I encourage enrollment of policy

makers, lobbyists, regulators, and educators onto the Career Development Quest; however, the experience of the quest would have value for almost everyone. **Joy Oakes, Grassroots coordinator, National Audubon Society.**

BIOGRAPHY

Michael H. Brown spent four years at St. Mary's Catholic Seminary and University, studying philosophy and theology; received his B.A. in Psychology from the University of Maryland in 1973; and his M.A. in Psychology from Sonoma State University in 1978. He has received more than 3000 hours of professional training from the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, The Albert Schweitzer Cultural Center in Mexico City, the Canadian Institute of Psychosynthesis in Montreal, the California Institute of Psychosynthesis in San Francisco, Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, the Monroe Institute of Applied Science in Faber, Virginia, and Tom Brown's Survival School in Ashby, New Jersey.

Michael was head counselor at a Federal Drug Abuse Clinic in Baltimore, Maryland (1972-4); Director of Professional Services at New England Center, a training institute for mental health professionals in Amherst, Massachusetts (1974-5); and on the training staff of the Canadian Institute of Psychosynthesis in Montreal (1975-77). He has taught courses at American University, Piedmont Virginia Community College, the University of New York at New Paltz, and other institutions of higher education.

Michael has appeared on more than 100 radio and television programs; has been featured in two national television documentaries concerning the use of innovative methods for developing human resources; has been a featured speaker at more than 25 conferences in Europe and North America; and has 15 published articles.

As a consultant, he regularly conducts seminars on topics such as stress management, team building, improving communication skills, managerial and supervisory development, conflict resoultion, and strategic planning. Some of his clients have been: IBM-Manassas, Office of the Secretary of the Navy, USDA-Forest Service, USDI-Bureau of Land Management, Association for Humanistic Psychology, Government of the District of Columbia, Virginia Department of Corrections, AT&T, and NASA. Michael is on the board of advisors of the International Wilderness Leadership Foundation. He has been self-employed and in private practice since 1978.

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